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ABSTRACT

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has adopted the following quality assurance and control policies for education program evaluation in Louisiana: (1) anyone who accepts and executes responsibility for planning, conducting and reporting evaluations of educational programs, projects, and materials approved by the State Board and for which evaluations are required must have a valid Louisiana program evaluator's certificate; and (2) the evaluations of educational programs, projects, and materials approved by the State Board must meet the State Board-adopted standards for educational evaluations. The certification of evaluators is administered in the same manner through which other education professionals are certified in Louisiana. The certification criteria present minimum education, experience and training requirements for two levels of evaluators, including the completion of a State Department inservice training program on the Standards for the Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials. As the first state to implement a certification requirement for evaluators, Louisiana has had to address several concerns: identification of evaluators, qualifications for evaluators, qualifications for certification, licensing exams, the Standards as an element of certification, and implementing a "grandfather clause." (Author/BW)

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CERTIFICATION OF LOUISIANA EDUCATIONAL EVALUATORS USING THE JOINT COMMITTEE STANDARDS

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CERTIFICATION OF LOUISIANA EDUCATIONAL EVALUATORS USING THE JOINT COMMITTEE STANDARDS

The Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education has adopted the following quality assurance and control policies for education program evaluation in Louisiana: 1) anyone who accepts and executes responsibility for planning, conducting and reporting evaluations of educational programs, projects, and materials approved by the State Board and for which evaluations are required must have a valid Louisiana program evaluator's certificate, and 2) the evaluations of educational programs, projects, and materials approved by the State Board must meet the State Board-adopted standards for educational evaluations. The Department of Education is administering these policies and monitoring the efficiency and effectiveness with which they are applied. The goal of this quality assurance effort is improved evaluation information for use by local and state policy and program decision makers. This paper explores the effect of the first quality assurance element, the certification of evaluators.

Historical Background

Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent annually evaluating educational programs in Louisiana. Increasingly, state and local policy makers are questioning the adequacy, cost effectiveness, and usefulness of the information obtained from these various efforts. There is a growing demand by the state and local boards of education and state and local education administrators for higher quality, and more efficient and useful evaluations. In recognition of the need to improve education program evaluation, the Certification Committee of

the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education recommended the establishment of a registry of approved project evaluators on March 21, 1979. This action resulted in two years of hearings to study and develop the vehicle and procedures to improve educational program evaluation in Louisiana.

The Board referred the development of guidelines for implementing the Registry of Approved Evaluators to the Office of Research and Development in the Department of Education. In light of the sensitive nature of imposing registry requirements on a heretofore independent arm of the education community, members of the evaluation profession were called on to provide guidance in the development of the guidelines. The resulting Task Force on Program Evaluation included professional evaluators and members from local education agencies, the Department of Education, federal programs and institutions of higher education.

The Task Force on Program Evaluation began its deliberations in January 1980, and presented its recommendations to the Education committee of the Board on July 23, 1980. In its deliberations, the Task Force made two major decisions which affected the tone and content of its final recommendations:

- The Task Force redefined the function of the Registry from that of a limiting mechanism to one of improvement and enhancement of the profession of education program evaluators; and
- The Task Force, recognizing that the Registry alone would only address minimum education, experience, and training requirements, introduced the use of evaluation standards

for judging the quality and effectiveness of the evaluation process

Along these same lines, the Task Force considered certification of program evaluators instead of a Registry. Failing to find support for this concept, the Task Force recommended Registry enrollment requirements paralleling the certification requirements finally adopted by the Board. Certification was ultimately the avenue recommended by the Task Force and adopted by the Board.

The Task Force recommended that the Joint Committee Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects, and Materials be used as the criteria for judging education program evaluations performed for and by the state and local agencies in Louisiana. The Task Force recommendations specified all evaluators including those "grandfathered" onto the Registry (or certification) be trained in interpretation and application of the Standards. Further, the Task Force recommended that the Standards be implemented and monitored through a published "checklist" which would be readily available to both producers and users of education program evaluations.

The Office of Research and Development endorsed the recommendations of the Task Force on Program Evaluation and presented them to the Board. Final Board action was taken January 22, 1981, when the Board approved as a rule the Criteria for Education Program Evaluators and Adoption of Standards for Evaluation. The Board rule was published February 20, 1981, in the Louisiana Register as Rule 3.01.70v(34).

Certification of Evaluators

The certification of evaluators is a relatively straightforward process administered by the Department of Education's Bureau of Higher Education and Teacher Certification in the same manner through which other education professionals are certified in Louisiana. The certification criteria present minimum education, experience and training requirements for two levels of evaluators. Level A evaluators are those individuals "who are employed either full-time or part-time by the state or local education agencies, who design, approve and/or direct program evaluations and research on educational programs, projects and materials in the State of Louisiana. Level A evaluators are responsible for assuring that evaluation plans are executed and reported according to prescribed requirements and specifications." Level B evaluators are those individuals "who under the direction of Level A evaluators, implement educational program evaluations and research in the State of Louisiana."

Generally, to become a certified Level A or B program evaluator the candidate must present written documentation of accomplishment of certification criteria. A printed certificate is, upon approval of the evidence, issued with a unique certification number.

Evidences for certification are as follows:

- Level A Program Evaluators

  1. Masters degree in education, psychology or other behavioral science areas;

  2. Coursework which includes a minimum of eighteen hours of graduate work in the fields of research methodology, statistics, and/or educational measurements;

3. a. Five years of professional school experience including at least two years as an evaluator of educational programs, projects and materials; or

   b. Three years of experience as an evaluator of educational programs, projects and materials; and

4. Successful completion of a State Department of Education inservice training program on the Joint Committee's Standards for Evaluation of Education Programs, Projects, and Materials

- Level B Program Evaluators

1. Masters degree in education, psychology or other behavioral science area;

2. a. Three years of professional school experience, or

   b. Three years of employment related to the specific tasks of the Level B evaluator including:

      drafting proposed research or evaluation designs for approval,

      collecting appropriate data,

      preparing data for analysis,

      developing appropriate generalizations from the data, and

      drafting evaluation results;

3. Successful completion of a State Department of Education inservice training program on the Standards for the Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects and Materials.

Appeal procedures are available when the written documentation is disallowed by the Bureau of Higher Education and Teacher Certification.

The Board's adopted evaluator certification policy included a Grandfather Clause which provided a phasing-in period wherein

individuals currently employed full-time with program evaluation as a major part of their job descriptions or, individuals providing program evaluation services by benefit of a contract with a local education agency or by state education agency, achieved certified status within six months of the implementation of the policy. The Grandfather Phase extended from July 20, 1981, to January 20, 1982.

Certification under the Grandfather Clause was contingent upon two additional requirements: (1) evaluators must have been recommended for certification by either the State Superintendent of Public Education or by a superintendent of a local education agency, and (2) they must have successfully completed the Department of Education's inservice training program on interpretation and application of the Standards. All persons certified under the Grandfather Clause received Level A certification. After the six-month phase-in period for persons qualified for certification under the Grandfather Clause, certification is accomplished according to minimum academic course requirements and job experience.

(The following paper by Dr. Janella Rachal on "Training in the Joint Committee Standards for Evaluation: Contents, Process, and Outcomes" describes the training during the Grandfather Phase and the participants.)

During the Grandfather Phase, the identification of evaluators ultimately was limited to SEA and LEA research and evaluation personnel, and representatives from ESEA Title I, Title IV-C, special education, migrant education, and vocational education, all of whom were responsible for their respective program evaluations. Personnel evaluators and pupil appraisal specialists were excluded

because of the focus of their evaluations (i.e., certification was required for only those persons evaluating educational programs and projects). Among those included the evaluation tasks were many and varied. A total of 362 participants were recommended by their respective superintendents and trained in the BESE-adopted Standards for Evaluation of Educational Programs, Projects, and Materials. The following is a list by employing agency of the numbers of persons trained:

79 from the Department of Education
- 3 from the Office of Management and Finance
- 11 from the Office of Research and Development
- 2 from the Office of Academic Programs
- 12 from the Office of Educational Support Programs
- 48 from the Office of Special Educational Services
- 2 from the Office of Vocational Education
- 1 Deputy Superintendent

15 from the Department of Corrections

4 from the Division of Administration

1 from the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education

233 from Local Education Agencies
- 106 from Federal Programs
- 11 from Vocational Education
- 16 from Curriculum and Instruction
- 26 from Administration
- 20 from Research and Evaluation
- 48 from Special Education
- 4 from Guidance and Counselling
- 2 from Professional Development Centers

30 Outside Consultants

Of the 362 persons trained, 323 have applied for and been awarded Level A certification (January 23, 1982). Of the 66 LEAs, all but one had at least one person certified under the Grandfather Clause. The number per LEA ranged from one to seven.

During the next stage (February to December 1982) of the

certification process we anticipate from 100 to 120 Level B program evaluators and another 20-25 Level A program evaluators who did not qualify under the Grandfather Clause. The implementation of the application stage of the quality assurance program will begin with the next school year (September 1982). The local evaluations of the state-funded Compensatory/Remedial Program will be monitored as the field testing of the quality assurance program, including certification.

Importance

Louisiana is the first state to implement a licensing, or certification, requirement for education program evaluators and the first to adopt the Joint Committee Standards as criteria for certification. As such, the State provides a pilot case which can either further or frustrate the aims of the profession and of the Joint Committee. Changes in federal government funding of education will most assuredly shift the burden of evaluation to the State Department of Education. This may make certification of evaluators more important to State Departments as the quality of evaluations increasingly becomes a topic for discussion.

We hope our experience will help others as they consider similar actions. We are willing to share the positive aspects of the certification of program evaluators in Louisiana as well as the problems we've encountered and the mistakes we have made. We want and expect our colleagues to examine our efforts.

Already we are being questioned. There are not ready answers for all of the questions and concerns that are raised. However, some of the concerns that have been identified are discussed below. Please

note that these are concerns, not answers.

- Identification of Evaluators: There have persisted in Louisiana numerous perceptions concerning evaluators, their responsibilities and their capabilities. The perceptions and misperceptions have been fueled by the common use of the term evaluator in all levels of education. For instance, there are evaluators of children and their skills and deficiencies; evaluators of plans and proposals submitted for certain programs or special projects; evaluators of personnel; evaluators for Title I, Title IV, Vocational Education, Special Education, etc.; evaluators who accredit schools; and so on. Evaluators are seen as people who assess the proficiency of others in doing their jobs or of schools and/or school systems in providing quality education; as people who test individual students or who administer state or local test batteries; as people who gather numbers for state of federally required reports; as people who assess the fiscal responsibility of a program, school system, etc. A common perception is that these people possess all of the necessary capabilities to evaluate any educational effort.

Any one or more of these perceptions may accurately reflect a particular situation or individual, they provide a compendium of responsibilities and capabilities of evaluators. However, identification of who is and who is not an educational evaluator cannot be achieved through the use of one explicit indicator. Some evaluators, on some assignments, work alone completing all of the necessary steps; other educational evaluators, or under different circumstances those same educational evaluators, work in teams pooling their skills and resources. In some circumstances part-time help is used, or a program participant or administrator is called in to provide program evaluation evaluation services.

- Qualification for Evaluators: Evaluation training alone will not suffice to qualify a person as an evaluator. Formal degrees in evaluation are rare, given the recency of the field. Graduate programs, when they are there, are new and vary considerably in the type and quality of training they provide. In Louisiana, there are currently no programs which focus on evaluation, at least according to course titles.

Adoption of the title of evaluator by an individual may or may not signify possession of the skills and sensitivity necessary to evaluate an educational program, nor does membership in professional organizations or presentations of papers to professional groups.

Experience in evaluation activities in Louisiana ranges from very good to very bad and by itself is not an indicator of evaluator status. Experience ranges from number gathering and crunching to on-site data collection to analysis of data to interpretation and reporting of information. Experience may be brief or extended; it may be supervised or unsupervised.

Types of experiences vary from program to program, and the needs for types of experiences vary from evaluation to evaluation.

For instance, in an evaluation of a project for handicapped children, a knowledge of and experience with the handicapping condition may be more important than experience with higher level statistics.

Evaluator skills are also difficult to isolate. Much has been written on the topic and there is some agreement on general skills but disagreement on peripheral skills. An evaluator who is not skillful in a needed area may seek the expertise needed from another evaluator or from a university or industry-based technician.

- Qualification for Certification: The state of the art of certification, at least in Louisiana, is such that qualifications must be quantifiable and of a paper and pencil nature. There have to be evidences. In our case, we specified education, experiences, and training because these were acceptable to the certifying agency (the Department) and to the policy makers (i.e., State Board members). Further, they were acceptable to the practitioners; they do not leave decisions open for judgements by some authority such as the Department of Education or the Board, or even other practitioners.

There is a real concern that these qualifications will exclude some very capable evaluators. And they well could (we have examples already). However, there is an appeals process with three different avenues that can be pursued by an individual with out the proper credentials. It's not ideal but it is a process.

We hope to add, sometime in the near future, another more direct avenue. One possibility is through peer review and juried evaluations. Another involves the development of a licensing exam.

- Licensing Exam: The notion of an examination for evaluators is controversial. Or the notion may not be so controversial because most people are opposed to it. In Louisiana, we have some experience with the concept of an exam. The Department proposed that an examination on the Standards be implemented for the sole purpose of indicating successful completion of our training program. We were vehemently opposed from several sources.

The primary concerns were legitimate: 1) It was felt that while the Department was proposing the exam for the workshop completion only, it would take on the weight of a licensing exam for program evaluators in the state. 2) If a licensing exam were possible, it was felt that it must go beyond the Standards. 3) Such an exam would need careful development and possess high levels of validity and reliability. 4) It was considered inappropriate for the Department, albeit different arms of the Department, to be the trainer, examiner and licensor.

Consequently, our proposed exam was disallowed. However, under other circumstances an exam might be appropriate and desirable.

- The Standards as an Element of Certification: Perhaps for the profession, the greatest concern must be the use of the

Standard as one of the elements in our certification process. The Standards certainly were not developed with such a use in mind. In fact, such a use was probably not considered by the Joint Committee. The Standards are relatively new and not thought of by the Joint Committee as finished; consequently, the Committee and its individual members are concerned with possible misuse and abuse.

We share these concerns. While we are breaking new ground in this area, we have honorable intentions and wish only to improve evaluations and evaluators in Louisiana. We want very much to avoid moral, ethical and legal mistakes and we are looking to the Joint Committee and to our colleagues across the country to scrutinize our efforts and to point out potential problems.

It was important in Louisiana to include the Standards. They provide a common frame of reference for all those who are charged with the responsibility for program evaluations and for those who use them. We are more convinced now than before that the Standards are a necessary element for Louisiana quality assurance. At this time, if we had to do it over, we would go the same route.

- Grandfather Clause: The Grandfather Clause is a two-edged sword. The Clause protected those who were employed prior to the Board Rule as evaluators or who had evaluation as a major part of their job requirements. Conversely, the Clause allowed many people to become certified who could not meet the other certification requirements. We have 323 certified Level A evaluators; probably less than ten percent of those are really qualified - or really have program evaluation as their jobs. The existence of the Grandfather Clause seems to defeat the original purpose for certification.

In addition to these concerns, there are several questions that come to mind. For instance:

- Is there a possibility of excluding some very capable evaluators because of our certification criteria? Yes. As mentioned earlier, there are currently three due process avenues that can be pursued to minimize such exclusions, all of which ultimately require State Board approval. Due process does not assure justice in all cases. Also, while these avenues provide a means for the capable evaluator, they also provide a means for the unqualified and imcompetent evaluator.

- The certification is "permanent;" does that mean that the certification cannot be revoked? No. The Board giveth; the Board can taketh away.

- Is it possible to exclude some potential out-of-state evaluators or independent evaluators? Yes, its possible, but not necessary. Out-of-state and independent evaluators can be certified by meeting Louisiana qualifications.

* * *

In Louisiana we now have 362 people who have been exposed to the Joint Committee's Standards. These persons know much more now about evaluation and evaluation processes than they did a year ago. Many will be conducting evaluations, and we think that the evaluations will be better as a result of the certification process. Others will be better consumers of evaluations. Regardless, I am sure that a positive impact has been made. A new higher level of expectation has been established for program evaluation.

The job is not over. The Department will continue to provide training and technical assistance. The universities are already modifying their programs to meet demands for additional courses. Some local school systems are using the Rule as a means of employing skilled evaluators.

The following papers provide more indepth discussions on 1) the training in the Standards, 2) the application of the Standards for improving evaluations, and 3) an evaluation of our progress over the next few years.